- HBO's smash hit show Chernobyl received 19 Emmy Awards, and due to the hit show NBC News reports tourism has dramatically increased in the once Soviet small ghost town of Pripyat. The remains of the homes and businesses of the over 50,000 individuals serves as an eerily reminder of the nuclear meltdown that drove nearly all the residents away in less than 36 hours. National Geographic report "Ruin gazing" is nothing new—for millennia, people have been drawn to broken cities and toppled monuments, places of quiet contemplation that remind us of our own hubris and of the power of time.", but what causes a ghost town and what are the potential similarities between it and your church website?
- Merriam-Webster defines a ghost town as a "once-flourishing town wholly or nearly deserted usually as a result of the exhaustion of some natural resource", When investing the time, energy, and finances into a new website church leaders are often optimistic. Hoping the website will connect visitors to their church while serving as a powerful tool for their members. And the investment into the website pays off as the buzz about the new website/design reinvigorates interest and traffic to the website. Yet, not long after the boom of excitement MinistryCraft has seen many church websites begin fading in their impact and now what once drove engagement now become an albatross. But why, what happened or changed?
- In our experience the leading reasons for church websites turing into digital ghost towns are as follows:
    1. Lack of leader engagement - most church leaders do not have the desire nor the bandwidth to learn the nuts and bolts of great website design. However, every church leader should recognize the value of great website design and its critical importance to the church's overall communications strategy. In his blog post Two Things Every Leader Should Avoid like the Plague John Maxwell says, "While some leaders are upfront about their ignorance—happy to declare that they know what's best despite evidence to the contrary—many leaders choose ignorance quietly by simply choosing not to grow." If your church leader you should know how the church website is connecting others to your church both digitally and in-person visitation. It is alarming how many church leaders we speak with who have not viewed their own website since its early inception. Choosing to remain ignorant of what your website communicates

diminishes your awareness and ability to speak into the message your church is communicating.

2. Out of the Loop - Technology is always evolving and changing how we communicate and relate to one another. You might be thinking to yourself, "I cannot keep up with current technology trends" to which is a good first step in admitting there is a problem. We are not suggesting you keeping up with the latest Google Trends or topics on Twitter. However, if you are not building your website to be mobile-responsive or still using clipboards as your primary means for event registration than you are limiting your growth potential. The reality is if your church website was created over five years ago it is time to change. "If an organization continues to resist progress and decides not to keep up with technology, they are likely to fade away into obscurity." according to this [Axis Technical Group post](#), which is the very definition of becoming a ghost town. .

3. Incorrect and/or obsolete information - A 2015-2016 poll of pastors [shared on ChurchLeadership.org](#) showed 54% of pastors work 55 or more hours per week and 18% more than 70 hours per week. This type of workload can lead to burnout or worse for those often most valued in our congregations. So, keeping the church website relevant with updated and correct information is a real challenge on top of more pressing or ministry related needs. Therefore, pastors must be willing to delegate these activities to someone on staff or better yet hire a full website management firm like MinistryCraft. Then, appoint someone on staff to double check on the information being shared to make sure all communications are correct. Often, those visiting the church website are unaware of the necessary burden unless something is wrong or outdated. Recently, while visiting a church website the top banner explained Sunday night services were cancelled and right below mentioned a back to school ice cream social that Sunday night after services. These type of confusing messages frequently happen and leave a confusing message to would be visitors and members alike. If these types of error persist, soon the website be dismissed as irrelevant and unhelpful.
   1. Learn how to avoid or recover from these common mistakes to avoid your website being abandoned and forgotten.

- Semi-Annual Checkup - If church leaders are disengaged with the church website we would recommend building systems and processes in place to begin tracking how many come to your church or church events based on what they found on the website. Another suggestion is to send out a yearly poll to your congregation asking what and how your members use it. Then, encourage the staff to look at the results while viewing the website to identify potential concerns of congregation and staff.
  1. Know your audience - Consider how the different segments of your congregation could benefit from using the church website. Then, encourage them to go to the website for more information or event registration. For example, parents of youth aged children may be interested in knowing that youth camp registration and payments can be taken care of online. Where older members may want to know the times for prayer meeting and/or church business meetings. Keep pointing to your website as the primary way to keep current of all the things happening at your church, but make sure you give specific examples not just a blanket "check out the website for more details" without first providing the why.
  2. Increase your knowledge - If you are a church leader encourage your leaders to continue to learn through reading new and different materials. As a church leader, you should be adopting this same philosophy. In fact, when it comes to website and

communication ideas consider partnering with someone. If both you are reading the same book new and different perspectives should be shared in a safe environment where staff can define the problem and brainstorm possible solutions.

Avoid your website becoming a ghost town by remembering a simple method to increase traffic.

1. Encourage - As a church leader make sure everyone knows to go to the website for information first.
2. Engage - As a church leader stay informed about the major changes in technology and your congregation to know how best to communicate with members and visitors.
3. Equip - Quit being a lone ranger and trying to do it all yourself. In a recent study of CEO it was found that most CEOs spend 80% of their time handling problems outside their natural gifting and responsibilities. Learn to delegate and enlist others or a full service management firm to help you in the design and implementation of your content.
1. Get your free examination of your church's website from a design professional.
   1. https://ministrycraft.com/contact-us